

THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

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WHEN shortly after I had accepted the honourable task which I am endeavouring to fulfil to-night, I received from your Secretary a report of the annual proceedings of the Birmingham and Midland Institute,—when I observed the immense range and variety of subjects included within your programme, illustrating so strikingly the intense intellectual activity of this great town,—my first feeling was one of some bewilderment and dismay. What, I asked myself, could I say that would be

8 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

of much real value, addressing an unknown audience, and relating to fields of knowledge so vast, so multifarious, and in many of their parts so far beyond the range of my own studies? On reflection, however, it appeared to me that in this, as in most other cases, the proverb was a wise one which bids the cobbler stick to his last, and that a writer who, during many years of his life, has been engaged in the study of English history could hardly do better than devote the time at his disposal to-night to a few reflections on the political value of History, and on the branches and methods of historical study that are most fitted to form a sound political judgment.

Is History a study of real use in practical, and especially in political, life? The question, as you know, has been by no

means always answered in the same way.

In its earlier stages history was regarded chiefly as a form of poetry recording the more dramatic actions of kings, warriors, and statesmen. Homer and the early ballads are indeed the first historians of their countries, and long after Homer one of the most illustrious of the critics of antiquity described history as merely 'poetry free from the incumbrance of verse.' The portraits that adorned it gave some insight into human character; it breathed noble sentiments, rewarded and stimulated noble actions, and kindled by its strong appeals to the imagination high patriotic feeling; but its end was rather to paint than to guide, to consecrate a noble past than to furnish a key for the future; and the artist in selecting

10 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

his facts looked mainly for those which could throw the richest colour upon his canvas. Most experience was in his eyes (to adopt an image of Coleridge) like the stern light of a ship,* which illuminates only the path we have already traversed; and a large proportion of the subjects which are most significant as illustrating the true welfare and development of nations were deliberately rejected as below the dignity of history. The old conception of history can hardly be better illustrated than in the words of Savage Landor. 'Show me,' he makes one of his heroes say, 'how great projects were executed, 'great advantages gained, and great calamities averted. Show me the generals 'and the statesmen who stood foremost, 'that I may bend to them in reverence.

‘ . . . Let the books of the Treasury lie
 ‘ closed as religiously as the Sibyl’s. Leave
 ‘ weights and measures in the market-place;
 ‘ Commerce in the harbour ; the Arts in the
 ‘ light they love ; Philosophy in the shade.
 ‘ Place History on her rightful throne, and
 ‘ at the sides of her Eloquence and War.’¹

It was chiefly in the eighteenth century that a very different conception of history grew up. Historians then came to believe that their task was not so much to paint a picture as to solve a problem ; to explain or illustrate the successive phases of national growth, prosperity, and adversity. The history of morals, of industry, of intellect, and of art ; the changes that take place in manners or beliefs ; the dominant ideas that prevailed in successive periods ;

¹ *Pericles and Aspasia.*

12 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

the rise, fall, and modification of political constitutions; in a word, all the conditions of national well-being became the subjects of their works. They sought rather to write a history of peoples than a history of kings. They looked specially in history for the chain of causes and effects. They undertook to study in the past the physiology of nations, and hoped by applying the experimental method on a large scale to deduce some lessons of real value about the conditions on which the well-being of society mainly depend.

How far have they succeeded in their attempt, and furnished us with a real compass for political guidance? Let me in the first place frankly express my own belief that to many readers of history the study is not only useless, but even posi-

tively misleading. An unintelligent, a superficial, a pedantic or an inaccurate use of history is the source of very many errors in practical judgment. Human affairs are so infinitely complex that it is vain to expect that they will ever exactly reproduce themselves, or that any study of the past can enable us to predict the future with the minuteness and the completeness that can be attained in the exact sciences. Nor will any wise man judge the merits of existing institutions solely on historic grounds. Do not persuade yourself that any institution, however great may be its antiquity, however transcendent may have been its uses in a remote past, can permanently justify its existence, unless it can be shown to exercise a really beneficial influence over our own society and our

14 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

own age. It is equally true that no institution which is exercising such a beneficial influence should be condemned, because it can be shown from history that under other conditions and in other times its influence was rather for evil than for good.

These propositions may seem like truisms; yet how often do we hear a kind of reasoning that is inconsistent with them! How often, for example, in the discussions on the Continent on the advantages and disadvantages of monastic institutions has the chief stress of the argument been laid upon the great benefits which those institutions produced in ages that were utterly different from our own,—in the dark period of the barbarian invasions, when they were the only refuges of a pacific civilisation, the only libraries, the only

schools, the only centres of art, the only refuge for gentle and intellectual natures ; the chief barrier against violence and rapine ; the chief promoters of agriculture and industry ! How often in discussions on the merits and demerits of an Established Church in England have we heard arguments drawn from the hostility which the Church of England showed towards English liberty in the time of the Stuarts ; although it is abundantly evident that the dangers of a royal despotism, which were then so serious, have utterly disappeared, and that the political action of the Church of England at that period was mainly governed by a doctrine of the Divine right of kings, and of the duty of passive obedience, which is now as dead as the old belief that the king's touch could cure

16 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

scrofula ! How often have the champions of modern democracy appealed in support of their views to the glories of the democracies of ancient Greece, without ever reminding their hearers that these small municipal republics rested on the basis of slavery, and that the bulk of those who would exercise the chief controlling influence over affairs in a pure democracy of the modern type were absolutely excluded from political power ! How often in discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of Home Rule in Ireland do we find arguments drawn from the merits or demerits of the Irish Parliament of the eighteenth century, with a complete forgetfulness of the fact that this Parliament consisted exclusively of a Protestant gentry ; that it represented in the highest degree the

property of the country, and the classes who are most closely attached to English rule; that it was constituted in such a manner that the English Government could exercise a complete control over its deliberations, and that for good or for ill it was utterly unlike any body that could now be constituted in Ireland!

✓ Or again, to turn to another field: it is quite certain that every age has special dangers to guard against, and that as time moves on these dangers not only change, but are sometimes even reversed. There have been periods in English history when the great dangers to be encountered sprang from the excessive and encroaching power of a monarchy or of an aristocracy. The battle to be then fought was for the free exercise of religious worship and expres-

18 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

sion of religious opinion, for a free parliament, for a free press, for a free platform, for an independent jury-box. All the best patriotism, all the most heroic self-sacrifice of the nation, was thrown into defence of these causes; and the wisest statesmen of the time made it the main object of their legislation to protect and consolidate them.

These things are now as valuable as they ever were, but no reasonable man will maintain that they are in the smallest danger. The battles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been definitely won. A kind of language which at one period of English history implied the noblest heroism is now the idlest and the cheapest of clap-trap. The sycophant and the self-seeker bow before quite other idols than

of old. The dangers of the time come from other quarters ; other tendencies prevail, other tasks remain to be accomplished ; and a public man who in framing his course followed blindly in the steps of the heroes or reformers of the past would be like a mariner who set his sails to the winds of yesterday.

It is difficult, I think, to doubt that the judgments of all of us are more or less affected by causes of this kind. It is, I imagine, true of the great majority of educated men that their first political impression or bias is formed much less by the events of their own time than by childish recollections of the more dramatic conflicts of the past. We are Cavaliers or Roundheads before we are Conservatives or Liberals ; and although we gradually

20 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

learn to realise how profoundly the condition of affairs and the balance of forces have altered, yet no wise man can doubt the power which the first bias of the imagination exercises in very many cases through a whole life. Language which grew out of bygone conflicts continues to be used long after those conflicts and their causes have ended; but that which was once a very genuine voice comes at last to be little more than an insincere echo.

The best corrective for this kind of evil is a really intelligent study of history. One of the first tasks that every sincere student should set before himself is to endeavour to understand what is the dominant idea or characteristic of the period with which he is occupied; what forces chiefly ruled it, what forces were

then rising into a dangerous ascendancy, and what forces were on the decline ; what illusions, what exaggerations, what false hopes and unworthy influences chiefly prevailed. It is only when studied in this spirit that the true significance of history is disclosed, and the same method which furnishes a key to the past forms also an admirable discipline for the judgment of the present. He who has learnt to understand the true character and tendencies of many succeeding ages is not likely to go very far wrong in estimating his own.

Another branch of history which I would especially commend to the attention of all political students is the history of Institutions. In the constantly fluctuating conditions of human life no institution ever remained for a long period un-

22 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

altered. Sometimes with changed beliefs and changed conditions institutions lose all their original utility. They become simply useless, obstructive, and corrupt; and though by mere passive resistance they may continue to exist long after they have ceased to serve any good purpose, they will at last be undermined by their own abuses. Other institutions, on the other hand, show the true characteristic of vitality—the power of adapting themselves to changed conditions and new utilities. Few things in history are more interesting and more instructive than a careful study of these transformations. Sometimes the original objects almost wholly disappear, and utilities which were either never contemplated by the founders, or were only regarded as of purely second-

ary importance, take the first place on the scene. The old plan and symmetry almost disappear as the institution is modified now in this direction and now in that to meet some pressing want. The first architects, if they could rise from the dead, would scarcely recognise their creation—would perhaps look on it with horror. The indirect advantages of an institution are sometimes greater than its direct ones; and institutions are often more valuable on account of the evils they avert than on account of the positive advantages they produce. Not unfrequently in their later and transformed condition they exercise wider and greater influence than when they were originally established; for the strength derived from the long traditions of the past and from

24 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

the habits that are formed around anything that is deeply rooted in the national life gives them a vastly increased importance.

There is probably no better test of the political genius of a nation than the power which it possesses of adapting old institutions to new wants ; and it is, I think, in this skill and in this disposition that the political pre-eminence of the English people has been most conspicuously shown. It is difficult to overrate its importance. It is the institutions of a country that chiefly maintain the sense of its organic unity, its essential connection with its past. By their continuous existence they bind together as by a living chain the past with the present, the living with the dead.

Few greater calamities can befall a

nation than to cut herself off, as France did in her great Revolution, from all vital connection with her own past. This is one of the chief lessons you will learn from Burke—the greatest and truest of all our political teachers. Bacon expressed in an admirable sentence the best spirit of English politics when he urged that ‘men in their innovations should follow the example of Time itself, which indeed innovated greatly, but quietly, and by degrees scarcely to be perceived.’

There is a third department of history which appears to me especially valuable to political students. It is the history of those vast Revolutions for good or for ill which seem to have transformed the characters or permanently changed the fortunes of nations either by a sudden

and violent shock, or by the slow process of gradual renovation. You will find on this subject, in our country, two great and opposite exaggerations. There is a school of writers, of which Buckle is an admirable representative, who are so struck by the long chain of causes, extending over many centuries, that preceded and prepared Revolutions, that they teach a kind of historic fatalism, reducing almost to nothing the action of Individualities; and there is another school, which is specially represented by Carlyle, who reduce all history into biographies, into the action of a few great men upon their kind.

The one class of writers will tell you with great truth that the Roman Republic was not destroyed by Cæsar, but by the long train of influences that made the career

of Cæsar a possibility. They will show how influences working through many generations had sapped the foundations of the Republic—how the beliefs and habits on which it once rested had passed away—how its institutions no longer corresponded with the prevailing wants and ideas—how a form of government which had proved excellently adapted for a restricted dominion failed when the Roman eagles flew triumphantly over the whole civilised world, and how in this manner the strongest tendencies of the time were preparing the downfall of the Republic, and the establishment of a great empire upon its ruins. They will show how the intellectual influences of the Renaissance, the invention of printing, and a crowd of other causes, many of them at first sight

very remote from theological controversies, had in the sixteenth century so shaken the power of the Roman Catholic Church, that the way was prepared for the Reformation, and it became possible for Luther and Calvin to succeed, where Wyckliffe and Huss had failed. They will show how profoundly our theological beliefs are affected by our general conception of the system of the universe, and how inevitably, as Science changes the latter, the former will undergo a corresponding process of modification. Creeds that are no longer in harmony with the general spirit of the time may long continue, but a new spirit will be breathed into the old forms. Those portions which are most discordant with our fresh knowledge will be neglected or attenuated. Although they may not

be openly discarded, they will cease to be realised or vitally operative.

In the sphere of politics a similar law prevails, and the fate of nations largely depends upon forces quite different from those on which the mere political historian concentrates his attention. The growth of military or industrial habits; the elevation or depression of different classes; the changes that take place in the distribution of wealth; inventions or discoveries that alter the course or character of industry or commerce, or reverse the relative advantages of different nations in the competitions of life; the increase and, still more, the diffusion of knowledge; the many influences that affect convictions, habits and ideals, that raise, or lower, or modify the moral tone and type—all these things concur in

shaping the destinies of nations. Legislation is only really successful when it is in harmony with the general spirit of the age. Laws and statesmen for the most part indicate and ratify, but do not create. They are like the hands of the watch, which move obedient to the hidden machinery behind.

In all this kind of speculation there is, I believe, great truth, and it opens out fields of inquiry that are of the utmost interest and importance. I have, however, long thought that it has been pushed by some modern writers to extravagant exaggeration. As you well know, there is another aspect of history, which, long before Carlyle, was enforced by some of the ablest and most independent intellects of Christendom. (Pascal tells us that

if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the whole face of the world might have been changed, and Voltaire is never tired of dwelling on the small springs on which the greatest events of history turn. Frederick the Great, who was probably the keenest practical intellect of his age, constantly insisted on the same view. In the vast field of politics, he maintained, casual events which no human sagacity can predict play by far the largest part. We are in most cases groping our way blindly in the dark. Occasionally, when favourable circumstances occur, there is a gleam of light of which the skilful avail themselves. All the rest is uncertainty. The world is mainly governed by a multitude of secondary, obscure, or impenetrable causes. It is a game of chance in which

the most skilful may lose like the most ignorant. 'The older one becomes the more clearly one sees that King Hazard fashions three-fourths of the events in this miserable world.'

My own view of this question is that though there are certain streams of tendency, though there is a certain steady and orderly evolution that it is impossible in the long run to resist, yet individual action and even mere accident have borne a very great part in modifying the direction of history. It is with History as with the general laws of Nature. We can none of us escape the all-pervading force of gravitation, or the influence of the climate under which we live, or the succession of the seasons, or the laws of growth and of decay ; yet man is not a mere passive weed

drifting helplessly upon the sea of life, and human wisdom and human folly can do and have done much to modify the conditions of his being.

It is quite true that religions depend largely for their continued vitality upon the knowledge and intellectual atmosphere of their time ; but there are periods when the human mind is in such a state of pliancy that a small pressure can give it a bent which will last for generations. If Mohammed had been killed in one of the first skirmishes of his career, I know no reason for believing that a great monotheistic religion would have arisen in Arabia, capable of moulding for more than twelve hundred years not only the beliefs, laws, and governments, but also the inmost moral and mental character of a vast

section of the human race. Gibbon was probably right in his conjecture that if Charles Martel had been defeated at the famous battle near Tours, the creed of Islam would have overspread a great part of what is now Christian Europe, and in that case it might have ruled over it for centuries. No one can follow the history of the conversion of the barbarians to Christianity without perceiving how often a religion has been imposed in the first instance by the mere will of the ruler, which gradually took such root that it became far too strong for any political power to destroy. Persecution cannot annihilate a creed which is firmly established, or maintain a creed which has been thoroughly undermined, but there are intermediate stages in which its influence on national beliefs

has been enormously great. Even at the Reformation, though more general causes were of capital importance, political events had a very large part in defining the frontier line between the rival creeds, and the divisions so created have for the most part endured.

In secular politics numerous instances of the same kind will occur to every thoughtful reader of history. If, as might easily have happened, Hannibal after the battle of Cannae had taken and burned Rome, and transferred the supremacy of the world to a maritime and commercial State upon the Mediterranean ; if, instead of the Regency, Louis xv. and Louis xvi., France had passed during the eighteenth century under sovereigns of the stamp of the elder branch of the House of Orange

or of Henry IV., or of the Great Elector, or of Frederick the Great ; if, at the French Revolution, the supreme military genius had been connected with the character of Washington rather than with the character of Napoleon—who can doubt that the course of European history would have been vastly changed ? The causes that made constitutional liberty succeed in England, while it failed in other countries where its prospects seemed once at least as promising, are many and complex ; but no careful student of English history will doubt the prominence among them of the accidental fact that James II., by embracing Catholicism, had thrown the Church feeling in a very critical moment into opposition to the monarchical feeling, and that in the last days of Anne, when the

question of the succession was trembling most doubtfully in the balance, his son refused to conform to the Anglican creed.

Laws are no doubt in a great degree inoperative when they do not spring from and represent the opinion of the nation, but they have in their turn a great power of consolidating, deepening, and directing opinion. When some important progress has been attained, and with the support of public opinion has been embodied in a law, that law will do much to prevent the natural reflux of the wave. It becomes a kind of moral landmark, a powerful educating influence, and by giving what had been achieved the sanction of legality, it contributes largely to its permanence. Roman law undoubtedly played a great part in European history long after all the condi-

38 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

tions in which it was first enacted had passed away, and the legislator who can determine in any country the system of national education, or the succession of property, will do much to influence the opinions and social types of many succeeding generations.

The point, however, on which I would here especially insist is that there has scarcely been a great revolution in the world which might not at some stage of its progress have been either averted, or materially modified, or at least greatly postponed, by wise statesmanship and timely compromise. Take, for example, the American Revolution, which destroyed the political unity of the English race. You will often hear this event treated as if it were simply due to the wanton tyranny of an English Government, which

desired to reduce its colonies to servitude by taxing them without their consent. But if you will look closely into the history of that time—and there is no history which is more instructive—you will find that this is a gross misrepresentation. What happened was essentially this. England, under the guidance of the elder Pitt, had been waging a great and most successful war, which left her with an enormously extended Empire, but also with an addition of more than seventy millions to her National Debt. That debt was now nearly one hundred and forty millions, and England was reeling under the taxation it required. The war had been waged largely in America, and its most brilliant result was the conquest of Canada, by which the

old American colonies had benefited more than any other part of the Empire, for the expulsion of the French from North America put an end to the one great danger which hung over them. It was, however, extremely probable that if France ever regained her strength, one of her first objects would be to recover her dominion in America.

Under these circumstances the English Government concluded that it was impossible that England alone, overburdened as she was by taxation, could undertake the military defence of her greatly extended Empire. Their object, therefore, was to create subsidiary armies for its defence. Ireland already raised by the vote of the Irish Parliament, and out of exclusively Irish resources, an army con-

sisting of from 12,000 to 15,000 men, most of whom were available for the general purposes of the Empire. In India, under a despotic system, a separate army was maintained for the protection of India. It was the strong belief of the English Government that a third army should be maintained in America for the defence of the American colonies and of the neighbouring islands, and that it was just and reasonable that America should bear some part of the expense of her own defence. She was charged with no part of the interest of the National Debt; she paid nothing towards the cost of the Navy which protected her coast; she was the most lightly taxed and the most prosperous portion of the Empire; she was the part which had benefited most by the late

war, and she was the part which was most likely to be menaced if the war was renewed. Under these circumstances Grenville determined that a small army of 10,000 men should be kept in America, under the distinct promise that it was never to serve beyond that country and the West Indian Isles, and he asked America to contribute £100,000 a year, or about a third part of its expense.

But here the difficulty arose. The Irish army was maintained by the vote of the Irish Parliament; but there was no single parliament representing the American colonies, and it soon became evident that it was impossible to induce thirteen State legislatures to agree upon any scheme for supporting an army in America. Under these circumstances Grenville in an ill-

omened moment resolved to revive a dormant power which existed in the Constitution, and levy this new war-tax by Imperial taxation. He at the same time guaranteed the colonists that the proceeds of this tax should be expended solely in America; he intimated to them in the clearest way that if they would meet his wishes by themselves providing the necessary sum, he would be abundantly satisfied, and he delayed the enforcement of the measure for a year in order to give them ample time for doing so.

Such and so small was the original cause of difference between England and her colonies. Who can fail to see that it was a difference abundantly susceptible of compromise, and that a wise and moderate statemanship might easily have

averted the catastrophe? There are few sadder and few more instructive pages in history than those which show how mistake after mistake was committed, till the rift which was once so small widened and deepened ; till the two sections of the English race were thrown into an irreconcilable antagonism, and the fair vision of an United Empire in the East and in the West came for ever to an end.

Or glance for a moment at the French Revolution. It is a favourite task of historians to trace through the preceding generations the long train of causes that made the transformation of French institutions absolutely inevitable ; but it is not so often remembered that when the States-General met in 1789 by far the larger part of the benefits of the Revolution could

have been attained without difficulty, without convulsion, and by general consent. The nobles and clergy had pledged themselves to surrender their feudal privileges and their privileges in taxation; a reforming king was on the throne, and a reforming minister was at his side. If the spirit of moderation had then prevailed, the inevitable transformation might probably have been made without the effusion of a drop of blood. Jefferson was at this time the minister of the United States at Paris. As an old republican he knew well the conditions of free governments, and among the politicians of his own country he represented the democratic section. I know few words in history more pathetic than those in which he described the situation. 'I was much acquainted,' he writes, 'with

the leading patriots of the Assembly. Being from a country which had successfully passed through a similar reformation, they were disposed to my acquaintance, and had some confidence in me. I urged most strenuously an immediate compromise to secure what the Government were now ready to yield. . . . It was well understood that the King would grant at this time, (1) freedom of the person by Habeas Corpus; (2) freedom of conscience; (3) freedom of the press; (4) trial by jury; (5) a representative legislature; (6) annual meetings; (7) the origination of laws; (8) the exclusive right of taxation and appropriation; and (9) the responsibility of Ministers; and with the exercise of these powers they could obtain in future whatever might be further necessary to

improve and preserve their constitution. They thought otherwise,' continued Jefferson; 'and events have proved their lamentable error; for after thirty years of war, foreign and domestic, the loss of millions of lives, the prostration of private happiness, and the foreign subjugation of their own country for a time, they have obtained no more, nor even that securely.'¹

Let me, in concluding these observations, sum up in a few words some other advantages which you may derive from History. It is, I think, one of the best schools for that kind of reasoning which is most useful in practical life. It teaches men to weigh conflicting probabilities, to estimate degrees of evidence, to form a sound judgment of the value of authori-

¹ Jefferson's *Memoirs*, i. 80.

48 THE POLITICAL VALUE OF HISTORY

ties. Reasoning is taught by actual practice much more than by any *a priori* methods. Many good judges—and I own I am inclined to agree with them—doubt much whether a study of formal logic ever yet made a good reasoner. Mathematics are no doubt invaluable in this respect, but they only deal with demonstrations; and it has often been observed how many excellent mathematicians are somewhat peculiarly destitute of the power of measuring degrees of probability. But History is largely concerned with the kind of probabilities on which the conduct of life mainly depends. There is one hint about historical reasoning which I think may not be unworthy of your notice. When studying some great historical controversy, place yourselves by an effort

of the imagination alternately on each side of the battle ; try to realise as fully as you can the point of view of the best men on either side, and then draw up upon paper the arguments of each in the strongest form you can give them. You will find that few practices do more to elucidate the past, or form a better mental discipline.

History, again, greatly expands our horizon and enlarges our experience by bringing us in direct contact with men of many times and countries. It gives young men something of the experience of old men, and untravelled men something of the experience of travelled ones. A great source of error in our judgment of men is that we do not make sufficient allowance for the difference of types. The

essentials of right and wrong no doubt continue the same, but if you look carefully into history you will find that the special stress which is attached to particular virtues is constantly changing. Sometimes it is the civic virtues, sometimes the religious virtues, sometimes the industrial virtues, sometimes the love of truth, sometimes the more amiable dispositions, that are most valued, and occupy the foremost place in the moral type. The men of each age must be judged by the ideal of their own age and country, and not by the ideal of ours. Men look at life in very different aspects, and they differ greatly in their ways of reasoning, in the qualities they admire, in the aims which they chiefly prize. In few things do they differ more than in their capacity

for self-government; in the kinds of liberty they especially value; in their love or dislike of government guidance or control.

The power of realising and understanding types of character very different from our own is not, I think, an English quality, and a great many of our mistakes in governing other nations come from this deficiency. Some thirty or forty years ago especially it was the custom of English statesmen to write and speak as if the salvation of every nation depended mainly upon its adoption of a miniature copy of the British Constitution. Now, if there is a lesson which history teaches clearly, it is that the same institutions are not fitted for all nations, and that what in one nation may prove perfectly successful,

will in another be supremely disastrous. The habits and traditions of a nation ; the peculiar bent of its character and intellect ; the degree in which self-control, respect for law, the spirit of compromise, and disinterested public spirit are diffused through the people ; the relations of classes, and the divisions of property, are all considerations of capital importance. It is a great error, both in history and in practical politics, to attach too much value to a political machine. The essential consideration is by what men and in what spirit that machine is likely to be worked. Few Constitutions contain more theoretical anomalies, and even absurdities, than that under which England has attained to such an unexampled height of political prosperity ; while a servile imitation of

some of the most skilfully-devised Constitutions in Europe has not saved some of the South American States from long courses of anarchy, bankruptcy, and revolution.

These are some of the political lessons that may be drawn from history. Permit me, in conclusion, to say that its most precious lessons are moral ones. It expands the range of our vision, and teaches us in judging the true interests of nations to look beyond the immediate future. Few good judges will deny that this habit is now much wanted. The immensely increased prominence in political life of ephemeral influences, and especially of the influence of a daily press; the immense multiplication of elections, which intensifies party conflicts, all tend to concentrate

our thoughts more and more upon an immediate issue. They narrow the range of our vision, and make us somewhat insensible to distant consequences and remote contingencies. 'It is not easy, in the heat and passion of modern political life, to look beyond a parliament or an election, beyond the interest of a party or the triumph of an hour. Yet nothing is more certain than that the ultimate, distant, and perhaps indirect consequences of political measures are often far more important than their immediate fruits, and that in the prosperity of nations a large amount of continuity in politics and the gradual formation of political habits are of transcendent importance. History is never more valuable than when it enables us, standing as on a height, to look beyond the

smoke and turmoil of our petty quarrels, and to detect in the slow developments of the past the great permanent forces that are steadily bearing nations onwards to improvement or *décay*.

The strongest of these forces are the moral ones. Mistakes in statesmanship, military triumphs or disasters, no doubt affect materially the prosperity of nations, but their permanent political well-being is essentially the outcome of their moral state. Its foundation is laid in pure domestic life, in commercial integrity, in a high standard of moral worth and of public spirit; in simple habits, in courage, uprightness, and self-sacrifice, in a certain soundness and moderation of judgment, which springs quite as much from character as from intellect. If you would

form a wise judgment of the future of a nation, observe carefully whether these qualities are increasing or decaying. Observe especially what qualities count for most in public life. Is character becoming of greater or less importance? Are the men who obtain the highest posts in the nation men of whom in private life and irrespective of party competent judges speak with genuine respect? Are they men of sincere convictions, sound judgment, consistent lives, indisputable integrity, or are they men who have won their positions by the arts of a demagogue or an intriguer; men of nimble tongues and not earnest beliefs—skilful, above all things, in spreading their sails to each passing breeze of popularity? Such considerations as these are apt to be for-

gotten in the fierce excitement of a party contest ; but if history has any meaning, it is such considerations that affect most vitally the permanent well-being of communities, and it is by observing this moral current that you can best cast the horoscope of a nation.

